

## God in Peoples’ Thought across Culture

by

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Language covers not merely natural languages but also sign languages, music, mathematics, and so on. It is true that art requires imagination, but all arts need some means and media to get across from the originators to their audience, and these are nothing but a language. In this way arts share a feature similar to that of music.

But all languages have their own limitations which are not necessarily the same from one language to another. My mother tongues are *Lanna* and English, and I believe in God. The existence of God has been proved by Descartes in two simple steps, *I think, therefore I exist*, then, *I exist, therefore God exists*. I find it disturbing when I found that most, if not all, languages of East and South-East Asia lack even a concept of existence. My *Lanna* is not good because the teaching of that language in school had been prohibited in my time, perhaps that is still the case now. But I am fluent in *Daii*, and I know that in that language the verb *to be* never has a meaning of *to exist*. In *Daii* you could render the former into *pen*, or *yǔ*, or *que*. And that is everything you could get from *to be*, or so you would say if you are a *Daii*. But in the face of its forgotten meaning of *to exist*, all the other three meanings combined, that is the *pen*, the *yǔ* and the *que*, could only amount to nothing in comparison.

What is said by Hamlet had been translated into Chinese to the effect that, ‘to live, or to die, that is the question.’ Though this is a double translation, that is to say, from English into Chinese, and then back into English again to get the above quote, I think you may find that you lack this concept of existence also in Chinese. In the future, once my Ante-Babel system for Chinese is completed, I may be able to find and to write again the particular quote I gave in its original translation.

So would it be true to say that people’s understanding of God could differ, that is to say, not being something equivalent the one with the other as we go from one language to another?, for instance from the languages of Europe and South India to those of East and South-East Asia?

If in any part of *Hamlet* there should have been a character, not necessarily Hamlet himself even, who said that *to be, or not to be* is *the* question, in other words, that that is *the* most important thing, then *Hamlet* instead of being a tragedy would immediately become a perfect comedy. *To be, or not to be* is everything, whereas *to live, or to die* is nothing. It is most distressing now and then to see everything translated into nothing this way. And so the question is whether people who know only languages of East or South-East Asia could appreciate Shakespeare in the same way as those of us whose languages are of Europe or South India. Can the former understand God the same way that the latter could? For what is this God but the *BE!* and the *I AM!* of the Old Testament.

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† namely AB *Daii*, English and *Lanna*